h Dickson G-8 (1929-47) 1931 Mf 1 Kuwait
Reduction 50%

Birth of a Baby

Chap. X

A man cohabits with his wife until close on the birth of their child. As soon as the baby is born, however, the mother becomes "unclean" (*najis* or *najis*) and the husband cannot go near her for forty days. This rule is carefully observed among all classes.

After a child is born, a very common method of treating the womb is to pack it with common salt. This is a very painful operation, and results in great suffering later, for a thickening of certain tissues supervenes, with disastrous consequences. The Mission hospital authorities in Kuwait and Bahrain are never tired of preaching the evil of the practice, but with little result.

After the birth of a child Badawin women, and more especially Arab townswomen, resort to various drugs, etc., to reduce the size of the vagina to normal, or less than normal. This "pleases the husband", they say. Alum is the basic principal of the drugs employed. Zahwa, Shammari wife of 'Abdullah bin Mau'sa of the Abdu,* told me this in April 1931 on one of my wife's and my many visits.

Many women, having had two or three children, dread to have more, and my wife has frequently been asked both in the town and in the desert of Kuwait how they can prevent further conception. It is universally believed among them that European women know many methods of contraception, but are unwilling to divulge their secrets. Among Badawin generally, if a woman has difficulty in bearing her child, a mare is brought in to her apartment or the portion of tent set apart for her; barley is then placed in her lap, and the mare is induced to eat. If the animal whinnies and eats, all is well, two or three rifle shots are fired at the same time, and the woman is thus given strength to bring forth.

It sometimes happens that immediately after birth the mother becomes what the Badawin call *mukhaddal* (mad), and unable to speak.† This is considered a very dangerous state, and according to them will result in death unless she can be induced to speak. In such situations also, a mare is hastily sent for and brought to the woman's side and offered barley from her lap. If the mare eats, the woman's tongue is loosed and her reason returns. If not, according to the common belief, the woman is sure to die.

On 20th February, 1933, in Kuwait, my own mare was borrowed

* Shammar tribe. † This aphasia is probably a form of hysteria.

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Infant Care

Chap. X

Lutfi
Lubu
Mahra
Mawlan
Mawra
Mazlum
Mufdi
Murai
Nasara
Nafa
Nijfa
Nijra
Nira
Nuriyah
Rashi

Sa'ada
Sahiba
Sawra
Shagha—('Ajman) [mother's grandaughter]
Shahba
Talba
Sita—('Ajman)
Sakra
Tufula
Ubaida
Wadha
Wasatiyah
Zahwa—[Shammar]

OPERATIONS OF BABIES

The birth of a Badawin baby is attended with as little fuss as the birth of a baby-camel. The infant is first and foremost bathed in a female camel's urine. As soon as possible afterwards, its eyes are rubbed over with antimony, to make them strong. All day long the baby is kept wrapped up in swaddling clothes, the arms being folded across the chest and bound there, and the legs tied close together at the knees and ankles. Before being swaddled the baby is laid flat on a square piece of black cloth covered with dry, powdered camel dung (formed into a dust). The baby is then wrapped up, and a little piece of black cloth is wound round its head to be replaced when it is about a month old by a cap which comes right down over both ears.

When the baby is being nursed, it is invariably placed on a circular piece of leather (*nimal*).

When the mother moves about on her various duties, or if cutting brushwood, she carries her baby slung across her back in a leather hammock (*mishlil*)*, the end-thongs of which are either passed round her forehead, or more often over one shoulder, the baby hanging down under her arm for warmth. On the march, the baby and hammock are placed with the mother in the *mahmal* (or woman's litter).

When the child is a few months old it is often slung in one of the

* Only 'Ajman, Beni Hajir, Beni Khalid, 'Awazim, Zaid, Murra, Manasir, Mawali ('Ajman) do this. Other tribes do not carry babies in leather hammocks.